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Retired cop jailed over Charlie Kirk meme settles unlawful incarceration lawsuit for over \$800K

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Larry Bushart is filing a lawsuit after sharing a meme related to the Charlie Kirk shooting landed him in jail for over a month. *(Courtesy LadyJay Creations LLC/FIRE)*



A retired Tennessee law enforcement officer who was held in jail for more than a month after police arrested him over a Facebook post of a meme related to the assassination of **Charlie Kirk** has settled a “unlawful incarceration” lawsuit for \$835,000.

Under the deal announced Wednesday, Larry Bushart, agreed to drop the five-month-old case alleging that his constitutional rights were violated when officials in Perry County, Tennessee, held him in jail for 37 days last fall.

“I am pleased my First Amendment rights have been vindicated,” Bushart said in a statement Wednesday. “The people’s freedom to participate in civil discourse is crucial to a healthy democracy.”

The case, which Bushart brought with the help of lawyers from the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, had been set to go to trial in late July before a federal jury in Memphis. He had not asked for a specific amount of money in the lawsuit.

Bushart’s lawyers said in court papers last year that their client, who is the primary breadwinner for his house, lost his post-retirement job because of his time in jail and that the episode had stifled his “participation in online political conversation because he is afraid that something like his arrest and incarceration might happen to him again.”

His legal woes first started 10 days after Kirk, a longtime supporter of President Donald Trump who worked to get him reelected in 2024, was fatally shot during an outdoor event at Utah Valley University on September 10.

Bushart shared a meme on Facebook about a vigil being held in Tennessee for Kirk.

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“This seems relevant today,” read the meme, which included a photo of Trump and a quote the then-candidate made in 2024 following **a shooting at Perry High School** in Des Moines, Iowa.

“We have to get over it,” Trump is quoted as saying in the meme, regarding the high school shooting.

Four officers came to Bushart’s home the next day, arrested him and took him to jail for “threatening mass violence at a school.” Authorities at the time said that the post was understood locally to be a threat to an area school that has a similar name to the one where the 2024 shooting occurred, according to court records.

Bushart was held behind bars for 37 days because he was unable to pay the \$2 million bond imposed on him. In late October, a district attorney in Tennessee moved to drop the single charge brought against him, and he was subsequently released.

His lawsuit charged Perry County; Nick Weems, the county’s sheriff; and Jason Morrow, a county investigator involved in the probe into Bushart, with a series of constitutional infringements, including violations of his free speech rights and his Fourth Amendment right against “wrongful arrest, wrongful prosecution, and wrongful incarceration.”

Under the settlement, the county, Weems and Morrow are not admitting any wrongdoing in last year's ordeal. The county's insurer will pay the settlement.

"As Sheriff, there is no responsibility I take more seriously than protecting the children in our community, who are some of the most vulnerable among us," Weems said a joint statement released as part of the settlement. "Ensuring their safety is not just a duty of this office, it is a commitment I carry with me every single day. I am happy to have this matter resolved, and I look forward to continuing to serve and protect the people of Perry County."



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